The Character of a well accompliſhed RULER deſcrib'd.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT THE

FREEMAN's MEETING,

IN

NEW-HAVEN,

APRIL 8, 1776.

And now publiſhed at the deſire and expence of many who heard it.

By *ALLYN MATHER*, A. M.
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When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn. PROV. 29, 2.

He that ruleth over men muſt be juſt, ruling in the fear of God. 2 SAM. 23, 3.

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EXODUS, XVIII. 21.

Moreover, thou ſhalt provide out of all the people, able men, ſuch as fear God, men of truth, hating covetouſneſs; and place ſuch over them to be rulers of thouſands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

EXPERIENCE and obſervation have taught men the neceſſity of civil government.---Were mankind under no reſtraint by human laws, but governed only by their vain and capricious humours, this world would be a confuſed place to live in; for they are ſo under the power and influence of paſſion, luſt and corruption, there would be nothing but murders, adulteries, rapine, and all manner of oppreſſions and wickedneſs, if they were let looſe in the world, without any reſtraint by civil government.

THE ſtate of the world is ſuch, ſince the original apoſtacy of man, that there is a great neceſſity of a good ſyſtem of laws to direct, meaſure and limit the actions of men, and ſome able and generous ſpirited men veſted with civil power to enforce thoſe laws and put them into execution.

THE very heathens, that were deſtitute of divine Revelation, have erected forms of civil government; and we have no reaſon to conclude, that they had any particular revelation to direct them to it. However, revelation is very far from condemning civil government, but eſtabliſhes it.

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As to the form of civil government, there is no one that is determinately fixed upon in the ſacred Oracles, to be a common rule obliging all communities to take their example ;---but it is a prudential matter, and to be wiſely accommodated to the genius of the place, and for the good of the whole community. Therefore, God ſuffered his peculiar people the Jews, to be under divers forms of government, at divers times. As there is no divine law for any form of government, mankind are at liberty to chooſe what form of government they like beſt, and judge will conduce moſt to their happineſs and ſafety, with this limitation their government is not contrary to the ſacred writings, or the general laws of nature.

The different ſorts of government are theſe three, *Monarchy*, *Ariſtocracy* and *Democracy*. The Britiſh conſtitution partakes of all three; and by writers in general, it has been allowed preferable to any other, that we have the knowledge of.---But the Britiſh Conſtitution has its imperfections---it may degenerate into tyranny on the one hand, or anarchy upon the other: either of which, is directly ſubverſive of the ends of civil government, and is the miſery of a people who are under them.

The end and deſign of civil government, is the peace and happineſs of a people: And thoſe who are elected to ſerve a people in places of eminence and importance, ſhould exerciſe their authority with this view, and be men duly qualified for the buſineſs with which they are intruſted. It is no ſmall matter to be intruſted with the intereſt of a people. The affairs of ſtate are frequently very perplexing, and require men of the greateſt abilities to manage them. He that is promoted to a place of eminence in civil government, ſhould be a man of knowledge and underſtanding, of courage and reſolution; and

and not only free from a covetous and contracted ſpirit, but endowed with a noble public ſpirit; a man of veracity and ſtrict juſtice, of piety and true religion. Theſe qualifications every civil ruler ought to be furniſhed with. And Jethro diſcovered, that he had the ſame ſentiment of the matter, when he adviſed his ſon Moſes to chooſe a number of aſſiſtants in government, as we have it recorded in our text. *Moreover, thou ſhalt provide out of all the people able men, ſuch as fear God, men of truth, hating covetouſneſs; and place ſuch over them to be rulers of thouſands and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.*

THESE words naturally lead me to deſcribe, or point out the qualifications neceſſary for a civil ruler.

THERE are a variety of qualifications that are very pleaſing to mankind; and are thought very much to commend a man to public eſteem and improvement: As an honorable parentage, a plentiful eſtate, and comely preſence, a courtly mein and deportment; affability of temper, and freedom of ſpeech; but theſe are the leſſer qualifications, and demand not our particular notice at this time.

THE perſon qualified for civil improvement,

I. MUST be a man of ſenſe, having a good underſtanding in the buſineſs with which he is intruſted.

THE affairs of civil government are often intricate, attended with many difficulties, and require men of the greateſt ſenſe, and deepeſt penetration to know how to conduct them. At ſuch a time as this, when every thing around us has a dark and threatning aſpect, the wiſeſt and moſt ſenſible politician is at a loſs how to conduct. The ſenſible ruler is the only one that is qualified to

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ſtand at helm at any ſeaſon, but at ſuch a ſtormy ſeaſon as this, to be under the government of an unſkilful Ruler, would probably ruin the whole community. As civil rulers are to be guardians of the people's intereſt and ſafety, they ſhould be men of diſcernment, able even at a diſtance to ſpy out dangers and threatening evils, and direct to ſuitable meaſures to avoid them. "The ends of civil government cannot be ſerved where knowledge is wanting." If our political heads are deficient in this point, what ſyſtem of laws ſhall we be regulated by? Or what oppreſſions ſhall we labour under? The wiſe king of Iſrael obſerves, *The prince that wanteth underſtanding is alſo a great oppreſſor.* And being ſenſible of the importance of this qualification, he prays to GOD for it, *Give therefore thy ſervant an underſtanding heart.*

DOES not *common ſenſe* dictate, that a perſon ignorant of ſtate matters, is not qualified for a civil ruler? Were a perſon travelling to any remote part of the earth, would he chooſe a blind man for a guide? Or would a prudent merchant truſt the ſettlement of his accounts, with a perſon that did not underſtand common arithmetic? Or would he venture his life, his intereſt upon the tempeſtuous ſea, with one that was ignorant of plain ſailing? Somewhat ſimilar is the preſent caſe. Shall we venture the management of our public affairs with ignorant politicians, that underſtand not the nature of civil government? It is true, there is a poſſibility of their taking right meaſures, but ſhall we truſt the public intereſt and ſafety upon a mere poſſibility? Shall we venture our liberties, and every thing that is near and dear upon ſo weak and ſlender a founda ion? If we ſhould be ſo unwiſe, we ſhall be criminally guilty, deſtroy our conſtitution, and bring ruin upon ourſelves.

THE more extenſive the politician's knowledge is, in ſtate matters, the greater bleſſing is he like to be to the community, of which he is a part; but if he ſhould be defective in this matter the public cannot expect much advantage from him. The direction therefore in the text is, provide out of all the people *able men*, men of ſenſe, that underſtand the buſineſs with which they are intruſted.

II. A CIVIL ruler muſt be a man of courage and reſolution, not daunted by frowns, nor the clamour of the injudicious. "Clear heads and ſtout hearts make good rulers."

WHEN our civil rulers are deſtitute of reſolution, or greatneſs of ſoul, our liberties will be in very unſafe hands, and the preſervation of our moſt important and darling privileges precarious.

IN the preſent alarming ſituation of our public affairs, our civil leaders ſhould be men of genuine courage, that would dare venture their lives in places of danger, to defend our liberties.---As the parliament of Great Britain have proclaimed war againſt us, and ſtigmatized us with the opprobrious name of rebels, and are determined to ſtrip us naked of our privileges, civil and religious, if they can raiſe a military force ſufficient; it is neceſſary, that we have men of the greateſt courage and reſolution to ſtand at the head of our public affairs, that will not upon every ſlight attack reſign up our important privileges.

IF our public affairs had been under the government of ſome perſons among us, who have publicly declared, that two or three thouſand regular troops would have been ſufficient to have driven the whole continent, we ſhould have been before this day in a ſtate of ſlavery,

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ſuffering under the cruel hand of tyranny. Or if our public affairs had been under the regulation of thoſe men who violently oppoſed the colonies taking up arms, through a *timidity of ſpirit*, we ſhould have been deprived of our charter'd rights and privileges, and loaded with burdens that we could not have ſuſtained.

SUFFER me therefore to ſay, that men of ſuch ſordid cowardice are not to be intruſted with public buſineſs. Far from a ſpirit of cowardice was good Nehemiah, he encounter'd the greateſt difficulties and oppoſition with undaunted courage and reſolution, well becoming a perſon, that had the management of public affairs.

III. PUBLIC ſpiritedneſs much embelliſhes the character of a perſon that takes the lead in civil government, and is abſolutely neceſſary to denominate any one a good ruler.

THE great end of civil government is not the enriching, or the aggrandizing the perſon advanced to a ſtate of eminence, but the peace and happineſs of a people. This is plainly intimated in the inſpired writings, *For he is the miniſter of God unto thee for good.*

IT is true, the particular and the private intereſt of the perſon advanced to civil rule, is uſually promoted: But however, not this, but the good and happineſs of the whole is the thing in view. "The end of magiſtracy, ſhould be the end of the magiſtrate." We may ſee this exemplified in Nehemiah, he was a man of a catholic ſpirit; of a truly great and generous ſoul. He was not ſo ſunk into ſelf, nor attached to his own private intereſt, as to be careleſs and unconcerned about the intereſt and welfare of the community of which he was a member.---He prefered the peace of Jeruſalem unto his chief joy, and was ſenſibly affected with the diſtreſſes of his poor countrymen; for when he heard in *Perſia* by his brother *Hanani*, who

who came from Jeruſalem, of the diſtreſſed ſtate of their public affairs, he was deeply affected, and filled with anxiety and concern, *He ſat down and wept and mourned, and faſted certain days.* This noble patriot, ſtimulated with the love that he had for his diſtreſſed countrymen, was very deſirous, not for the ſake of his own honor, eaſe or pleaſure, but that he might redreſs their grievances, under which they then ſuffered, raiſe them from that low ſtate of ſervitude, and promote their public intereſt and ſafety. This I ſay undoubtedly was his view; he was actuated by a noble public ſpirit. And by a ſimilar ſpirit ought every civil ruler to be actuated, in order to be publicly uſeful. The cloſe-fiſted, and narrow contracted perſon was never deſigned by heaven for public improvement, for he is deſtitute of an eſſential qualification.---It is true, he may poſſibly keep the road of juſtice, where intereſt runs along with duty; or when he can't tranſgreſs without doing ſome great injury unto his private intereſt: But when duty and private intereſt are in competition, he will deſert the public good, that he may ſupport his own private intereſt. Shall we then promote a perſon to civil improvement, that is of ſuch a narrow contracted ſpirit? Our text ſays, provide out of all the people, men of truth, *hating covetouſneſs.* The covetous man is unfit to be intruſted with public buſineſs; for a perſon of ſuch a complexion, would ſell his country, his birth-right-privileges, if not for *a meſs of pottage*, he would for ſix-pence or a groat.

If we will view him in a private capacity, we ſhall find him a peſt to civil ſociety; he is ſo attached to his own intereſt, that he is unwilling to contribute any thing to the ſupport of government; or to defray any part of the public charges: And if we view him in a public ſtation, we ſhall find him a greater plague to ſociety, than when he was only a private member. Let us therefore, if we have any regard to our ineſtimable privileges, conſcientiouſly avoid promoting men of ſuch a turn of mind:

for when the government of a ſtate is put into the hands of ſuch men, we cannot expect any thing but oppreſſion, injuſtice, the loſs of our privileges, and almoſt every civil miſchief.

IV. The civil ruler muſt be a perſon that pays a ſincere regard to the truth. God the ſupreme Governor of the world, is a God of truth, and ſo delights in truth, and would have all the children of men partake of this virtue, eſpecially thoſe who govern under him.

Our public affairs, particularly at ſuch a time as this, call for a juſt repreſentation; but this we cannot expect, unleſs our public affairs are committed into the hands of men that pay a ſincere regard to the truth. For the want of a juſt repreſentation, communities and ſtates have long groaned under ſevere calamities. Our preſent diſtreſſes did greatly riſe from this quarter. Although we have been peculiarly favoured in this colony, reſpecting our civil rulers, yet in the neighbouring colonies, ſome of their governors and counſellors have repreſented the ſtate of theſe united colonies in a very injurious, and may I not be permitted to ſay in a falſe manner. And to their falſe repreſentations we may attribute, in a great meaſure, thoſe diſtreſſes under which we now labour. Therefore great care is to be taken, that we elect men of approved veracity. *Provide out of all the people, men of truth.* And it is equally important that the civil ruler ſhould be a man of *juſtice*, agreeable to which, we have theſe inſpired words, *He that ruleth over men, muſt be juſt.*

The civil ruler is ſubject to a variety of temptations, and liable many ways to be turned aſide from doing his duty. His exalted ſtation in life, does not free him from the aſſaults of temptation, but rather expoſes him thereto. Sometimes he is tempted with the deſire or hope of gain, to do that which is deſtructive to the liberties of the people. Sometimes he is tempted, with the love and reſpect that he has for a perſon, to neglect his duty, through

through fear, that he ſhould get his reſentment, and looſe his friendſhip.---Sometimes he is tempted with a real, or ſuppoſed injury that he has received, to deny juſtice, or to uſe the public ſword in his private quarrel. It is neceſſary therefore that he ſhould be a perſon of ſtrict juſtice, that will not juſtify the wicked for reward; or take a bribe to pervert judgment. The prophet Iſaiah gives the character of a good ruler. *He that walketh righteouſly, that deſpiſeth the gain of oppreſſions, that ſhaketh his hands from holding of bribes.*

I WOULD add, The civil ruler ſhould be a man of good political ſentiments. A perſon may be heterodox in his political, as well as religious ſentiments. We are not inſenſible of the different ſentiments between WHIGS and TORIES :---the latter hold to ſentiments very diſtructive to the liberties of mankind: They have high notions of civil government, and judge that we ought in all caſes to ſubmit to the authority of the king; and that it is treaſon and rebellion to reſiſt him in any caſe whatever. This is a ſentiment that brings ruin and devaſtation upon a people. Lord Sommers ſays upon the ſubject, " The preaching or promoting of paſſive obedience without reſerve, is a much greater crime than the encouraging of rebellion; becauſe a civil war, though very ſharp, cannot continue long, and a nation may flouriſh and be happy again. But if once arbitrary government be introduced upon the principles of *paſſive obedience*, peoples' miſeries are endleſs; there is no proſpect or hope of redreſs: Every age will add new oppreſſions, and new burdens to a people already exhauſted. Nor has it any other uſe than to encourage kings to be tyrants, and to render them odious, and their people miſerable."

Now ſhall we intruſt our public intereſt with men, that hold to principles ſo pernicious to the liberties of mankind? If this doctrine had been univerſally believed by our civil leaders at this day, before now, we ſhould have been miſerable under tyranny and oppreſſion.

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THERE is a ſet of men, and I hope they may never have any influence in church or ſtate, who pretend they do not believe in the doctrine of paſſive obedience, yet they are bold to ſay, That the people of Boſton were a factious diſorderly people, and were criminally guilty in deſtroying the TEA; and that the parliament of Great-Britain have a right to tax the colonies, how, and when they pleaſe; and in the preſent diſpute, to take up arms in defence of our liberties, is rebellious. I ſay, men of theſe ſentiments are never to be intruſted with the public intereſt, but they are to be deſpiſed and neglected by every ſon of freedom.

IN the laſt place, the civil ruler muſt be a perſon diſtinguiſhed for religion.

THIS is the moſt eſſential qualification in a civil ruler, and demands our greateſt attention. "Religion," as one expreſſes it, "is a greater ornament to a public ſtation, than all enſigns of royalty, or external marks of dignity; and gives the greateſt ſecurity of preſerving integrity." Religion teaches civil-rulers to rule over men in the fear of GOD. Although they be ſtiled god's on earth, yet they are ſubjects to the GOD of heaven and accountable to him, who is higher than the higheſt. Religion in a magiſtrate ſtrengthens his authority, becauſe it procures veneration and eſteem among men.--- We ſee that virtue wherever it is found among men of lower degree will command reverence and reſpect: But in perſons in public place, it caſts a very luſtre upon their office, and by ſtrong reflection doubles the beams of magiſtracy. Whereas, upon the other hand, impiety does ſtrangely leſſen greatneſs, and bring public authority into contempt.

BESIDES, mankind are greatly inclined to imitation, eſpecially to imitate thoſe who are in public life; therefore it is obſerved, that when a community is under the government of wicked and deſigning men, then all manner

ner of wickedneſs, and every kind of oppreſſion and diſorder are prevalent.

And when on the other hand, a community or ſtate is under the government of religious men, then virtue and piety flouriſh. Somewhat ſimilar is the hiſtory of the Jews, when their chief rulers were men of piety, and ruled in the fear of God, then they flouriſhed both in things ſpiritual and temporal.---And upon the other hand, when their rulers were irreligious, then they were frowned upon both in civil and religious matters.

'Tis acknowledged that men deſtitute of the noble principles of religion may be wiſe politicians, as among the ancient Greeks and Romans, there were ſome that were deſtitute of theſe principles, exhibited noble inſtances of *patriotiſm*; But men deſtitute of the noble and divine principles of religion, may not be relied upon with that ſafety, as thoſe that have them rooted and fixed in their hearts, and always influencing them to do their duty. And further, it is not probable, that men who have not experienced the ſaving truths of the goſpel, that they will exert themſelves ſteadfaſtly to maintain the cauſe of religion againſt all its oppoſers; but the probability is upon the other ſide, that if God ſhould revive religion in a remarkable manner, as he has done in times paſt, that inſtead of maintaining and ſupporting the good work of God, they would violently oppoſe it. As civil rulers are to be nurſing fathers to the church, as well as ſtate, they muſt be men that are warmly engaged in the cauſe of religion, and ſeek to advance the proſperity of Zion.

I shall now conclude this diſcourſe with an addreſs to the Freemen of this ancient and reputable town.

Men and Brethren,

Through the goodneſs of our great Creator, and kind Benefactor, after a ſeries of trouble, and anxiety,

ty, ariſing from the alarming ſituation of our public affairs, we ſee the return of this anniverſary.

THIS colony from the very beginning, has been elective, a privilege of which we have long boaſted: And may GOD grant that this privilege, with all our other important privileges may continue to us forever unmoleſted.

As the preſent ſtate of our public affairs is truly alarming, and preſents us with a moſt threatening aſpect---with the loſs of our invaluable privileges, civil and religious: we ſtand in need of the beſt qualified men to govern at ſuch an important criſis.

As the buſineſs of the day is to make choice of our rulers, our ſubject was deſign'd to inſtruct us what men we ought to elect into places of civil truſt. *Able men*, i. e. men of ſenſe, that underſtand the buſineſs with which they are intruſted; and are endowed with courage and reſolution, ſo as not to be daunted with frowns, nor the clamour of the injudicious, a qualification very important at ſuch a time as this.

THEY muſt be men of a public ſpirit, intirely free from covetouſneſs; men of good political ſentiments, of real piety and religion, of veracity and ſtrict juſtice; *Such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetouſneſs.* Of ſuch a character, I ſay, ſhould thoſe ever be, with whom the concerns of the public are intruſted, but more eſpecially at ſuch a time as this, when the ſtate of our country calls for the beſt men.

WE are now bound by a ſolemn oath to give our ſuffrages for ſuch as we judge beſt qualified for public improvement, without reſpect of perſons, or the favour or frowns of any man. The oath of GOD is upon us, and is not ſuch an oath binding? And ſhall we not be daringly wicked to counteract it? But I fear this ſolemn oath is too little regarded, and that favourite men, or party

party ſchemes unreaſonably biaſs our minds, and lead us from the path of duty. We are not to give our voice for a perſon becauſe he is of our party, or belongs to the ſame church and ſociety, (this ſhould have no influence) but we ſhould give our vote for him, that is moſt likely to be publickly uſeful. Let us therefore in our election this day lay aſide all party zeal, and in our choice have a principal view to the public ſafety. The preſent ſtate of our public affairs requires our greateſt union, *our union is our ſafety*; we ſhould then, if from no other principle but ſelf-preſervation, be inclined to throw by all party matters, and unite all our vigorous endeavours for the public weal.

The preſent critical ſituation of our public affairs, requires that our rulers be men of the beſt abilities, both natural and acquired, that feel the diſtreſſes of the times, and are willing to ſpend their blood and treaſure, and every thing that is near and dear for the ſupport of our liberties.

Let us conſider that our moſt important intereſt is intruſted with our civil rulers. And are we willing to commit our moſt valuable effects to the cuſtody of one who is unfaithful, and would ſquander them away; or to one who is weak and unable to defend them: Or to one who is cowardly, that upon any ſlight attack would deſert them? But we ſhall conduct ſomewhat ſimilar when we intruſt our public intereſt with unſkilful rulers. Suffer me to ſay, there are two ſorts of perſons, who would be fond of promotion, either of which are not to be intruſted with the liberties of mankind, and let us be very careful this day, that we give them no place in any public ſtation.

The firſt are perſons, who violently oppoſed the colonies making any reſiſtance againſt the king's troops, by arms, but ſince, they are turned about, and pretend to be zealouſly engaged in the cauſe of liberty. Such men, I ſay,

ſay, are not to be truſted, for they will be on any ſide, which they imagine to be the ſtrongeſt, or the moſt likely for them to gain promotion.

THE other are perſons, who pretend to be high Sons of Liberty, and are for killing every body, that has ever been guilty of violating the Aſſociation of the general Congreſs, but at the ſame time, they would not ſtick at all at violating of it themſelves, if they could gain a farthing by it, or promote their own private intereſt: they will take the advantage of the times, and oppreſs their poor countrymen to enrich themſelves; ſuch men ought to be branded with a character, that will never be effaced.

LET us in our choice have a view to ſuch men, who have from the beginning been firm and ſteady in the grand cauſe; ſuch are the only men with whom the liberties of mankind may be intruſted, with ſafety.

LET me add, as the ſtate of our public affairs at the preſent, requires the moſt intrepid, vigorous exertions in our defence, it would be utterly improper, and groſsly abſurd, to ſet the timid and fearful at the helm: Or perſons who can think of nothing but reconciliation, unavailing ſupplications, and ſubmiſſion to a murderous tyrant, whoſe heart is inſenſible to the cries and prayers of the oppreſſed, and to the dying groans of his ſubjects, ſlaughtered by his royal command; perſons I ſay, whoſe hearts tremble, and melt at the thought of a few Britiſh red coats, and are ready to flee into the mountains for ſhelter, on every rumour of an armed ſhip on our coaſts: Altho' ſuch perſons may be as honeſt, as they are weak, yet it would be unwiſe to intruſt them with the management of public affairs, at this critical time.

BUT to conclude, may GOD, who has hitherto ſmiled upon us, in a very remarkable manner in our endeavours to defend our juſt rights and liberties, ſtruck terror into the hearts of our enemies, and made them flee before us, be preſent with us this day, and influence us to the choice of our rulers, and in due time may peace and liberty be reſtored to this land.